

## Process of Decolonization in *Nābulyūn fī al-Azhar* “Napoleon in Al-Azhar”

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### ABSTRACT

This paper examines the decolonization process in Najib Al-Kailani's novel, *Nābulyūn fī al-Azhar* (*Napoleon in Al-Azhar*-1980). The study explores the ways the colonized react to the colonizers in order to regain liberty, freedom, and sovereignty of their land. Decolonization is the reverse process of colonization by which colonies become independent of the colonizing country. Najib Al-Kailani (1931 – 1995) is an Egyptian novelist, poet, and critic. In his writings, he focuses on the colonial experiences that the Arabs and Muslims have faced throughout history. Al-Kailani here wrote a revisionist novel recounting the French invasion of Egypt in the eighteenth century (1798-1801) commanded by Napoleon Bonaparte (15 August 1769 – 5 May 1821), the general in Chief of what they called at that time 'Armée d'Orient' (English: Army of the Orient) and depicts the people's resistance and rebellion against the colonizer. The novel depicts the Egyptian resistance, against French subjugation and humiliation, and sacrifices for the sake of independence and dignity. The analysis of decolonization based on the events in the novel is executed by applying Frantz Fanon's theory of resistance and revolution which embodies three stages and steps of decolonization. These stages are: assimilation to the colonizer's culture, rediscovery of their own culture and identity, and finally the confrontation with the colonialists. Colonized people usually do not reach the confrontation stage with the colonizer unless they go through the first two stages; assimilation and rediscovery. The paper also discusses the impact of the violence experienced by both the colonizer and the colonized as a result of the confrontation.

**Keywords:** decolonization; Najib Al-Kailani; Arabic novel; Frantz Fanon; French invasion

### INTRODUCTION

This paper analyzes aspects of resistance depicted in *Nābulyūn fī al-Azhar* (*Napoleon in Al-Azhar*, 1980). The novel was written by the Egyptian novelist Najib Al-Kailani (1931-1995). It is a revisionist recounting of the French invasion of Egypt in the eighteenth century (1798-1801) under the command of Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821). Al-Kailani recalls and records the events of that era and reproduces them in a literary form.

The paper focuses on decolonization procedure which is the reverse process of colonization. It starts when the oppressed people move to gain back their liberty, freedom, and sovereignty of their land. Besides being a long and complicated process, the decolonization process takes many shapes and forms but eventually it ends with the withdrawal of the colonialist forces and the liberation of the colonized land and people. In postcolonial studies, decolonization or the anticolonial resistance is the core of this field or it is as Lois Tyson asserts in *Critical Theory Today* (2006), “the foundational concept of postcolonial criticism” (p. 424).

Theorists like Edward Said (1935-2003), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (b.1942), and Frantz Fanon (1925-1961) have all addressed this concept in their seminal works. Said (1993), in his book *Culture and Imperialism*, is more concerned, as his book title suggests, with the cultural dimension in the decolonization process and, in particular, in the third chapter of the book “Resistance and Opposition”. He states that “culture played a very important, indeed indispensable role, both in extending and securing empire and in eroding and undermining it” (Said, 1993, pp. 221-222). Culture in its simplest definition is a set of beliefs, values, norms, customs, traditions, rituals, and a way of life that differentiates one group from another (Kim, 2003). Whereas Fanon, in his writings, focuses on the nature of decolonization when he argues that decolonization must always be a violent phenomenon. “Colonialism is not a thinking machine, nor a body endowed with reasoning faculties...[it] is violence in its natural state, and it will only yield when confronted with greater violence” (Fanon, 1963, p.61).

In *Napoleon in Al-Azhar* (1980), Al-Kailani provides a model of colonization and decolonization process. This narration of the Egyptian resistance against the French military campaign will be discussed based on Fanon’s theory of resistance and revolution. Frantz Fanon was a Marxist literary scholar, author, philosopher, psychiatrist, and member of the Algerian National Liberation Front (Front de Libération National (FLN)) during the Algerian revolution against France (1954-1962). Reacting to the horrors of oppression he witnessed when working as a psychiatrist in Algeria during the Algerian Revolution, “Fanon treated many patients suffering from what he believed to be oppression-related mental illness; as a result, he authored four seminal works which centre around a Manichean psychological framework deployed to deconstruct the horrors of colonial oppression” (Hilton, 2011, p.45). The books are: *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), *Dying Colonialism* (1959), and *Toward the African Revolution* (1964).

## HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The historical heritage of the Arab World and The Middle East region was reflected in many literary works that transformed and reproduced these events in literary form. Najib Al-Kailani was obsessed by this great inheritance, so his writings have dealt with almost all aspects of human life, particularly the sufferings of the Muslim nation under the colonial rule in different eras of the history and different places. Most of his novels deal with the major historical events taking place in different Islamic countries.

Throughout Egypt’s history and even during the rule of the Ottoman Empire since 1517, The Egyptians had left the internal affairs of Egypt to the Mamluks who were “the aristocracy of ex-slave soldiers who had ruled Egypt since 1250” (Goldschmidt Jr & Lawrence, 2006, p. 171). This situation continued until the eighteenth century when the French arrived and conquered Egypt. In this period, the Mamluks continued to import Circassian boy slaves and trained them as soldiers and administrators. In time the Mamluks “had become rapacious tax-farmers and cruel governors” (Goldschmidt Jr & Lawrence, 2006, p.171). Ironically, there was a decade-long struggle for dominance and rivalry among the

Mamluk leaders known as 'beys'. Eventually by the end of the eighteenth century, Ibrahim Bey and Murad Bey had seized power and ruled Egypt until the French army demolished their thrones.

Because of Egypt's geopolitics and for political and economic reasons such as rivalry with Britain and personal ambitions, Napoleon Bonaparte (1796-1821) led an army to conquer Egypt in 1798. His troops, equipped with advanced weapons, defeated the Mamluks easily. The first battle took place in Alexandria, on July 1<sup>st</sup> 1798, and it had not taken long before the Alexandrians surrendered. In less than a month, the French forces occupied the Egyptian capital, Cairo, on July 25<sup>th</sup>. Murad Bey, one of the Mamluk leaders, fled to Upper Egypt while Ibrahim Bey, the second Mamluk leader, and the Ottoman viceroy left for Syria. Strikingly, the Mamluk's rule in Egypt that lasted for hundreds of years mostly collapsed in less than a month. However despite the strength of the French forces, they could control only the Delta and Cairo while Upper Egypt was the preserve of the Mamluks and the Bedouins.

After defeating the Mamluks, Napoleon attempted to persuade the Egyptian people from rebelling and also to convince them to support his mission against the Mamluks. To implement this, he claimed that he was their saviour from Ottoman rule and the Bey's oppression. He propagated manifestos such as this:

People of Egypt, you will be told that I have come to destroy your religion. This is an obvious lie; do not believe it! Tell the slanderers that I have come to you to restore your rights from the hands of the oppressors and that I, more than the Mamluks, serve God . . . and revere His Prophet Muhammad and the glorious Quran. Tell your nation that the French are also faithful Muslims. The truth is that they invaded Rome and have destroyed the throne of the Pope, who always incited the Christians to make war on the Muslims.

Blessing upon blessing to the Egyptians who side with us. They shall prosper in fortune and rank. Happy, too, are those who stay in their dwellings, not siding with either of the parties now at war; when they know us better, they will hasten to join us... But woe upon woe to those who side with the Mamluks and help them to make war on us. They will find no escape, and their memory shall be wiped out (Goldschmidt Jr & Lawrence, 2006, pp.171-172).

The second step Napoleon took was on July 27 1798 to form an advisory council, *al-divan*, which constitutes the elites and highly respected Egyptians. The advisory council was made up of Muslim scholars and clergymen and excluded other representatives from social sectors such as the merchants:

The members of the divan were the cream of the country's theologians and religious jurists. They included Sheikh Abdullah Al-Sharqawi, Sayyid Khalil Al-Bakri, Sheikh Mustafa Al-Damanhuri, Sheikh Mustafa Al-Sawi, Sheikh Shams Al-Din Al-Sadat, and other highly respected teachers and writers, though the exact composition is controversial. (Cole, 2007, p.75).

One of the reasons for this structure of *al-divan* is due to the significance of the role of religion. Cole (2007), in his book about Napoleon expedition *Napoleon's Egypt: Invading the Middle East* states that:

Bonaparte felt that the chief obstacle to the acceptance of French authority in Egypt would be Islam and that only a government of the clerics could plausibly lend their authority to his contention that French deists were as acceptable as Muslims when it came to rule (p. 75).

Playing on the heterogeneity factor, Napoleon suggested the appointment of military and administrative leaders from the minorities in the Egyptian society. Cole (2007) also claims the “French initially objected to filling any such posts with persons of Georgian or Circassian ethnicity” (p. 75). This step was also to ensure the loyalty of the newly appointed people to the French authority. On the other hand, it helped to widen the gap between the different sects of society, which happens to be one of the objectives of a colonial force.

All these efforts did not succeed in calming the Egyptians down and prevent a revolution. The French commander, Bonaparte failed to convince them to support him or at least to stay non-aligned. Moreover, the colonialist committed critical mistakes as Arthur Goldschmidt Jr (2006) stated “ignorant of local mores and customs, the French troops shocked pious Muslims by their lewd conduct, public drinking, and blasphemous behavior” (p.172). All these attitudes and practices angered the people and incited them against the colonial forces. However when the people protested, the colonial forces reaction was severe and excessive which gave the Egyptian additional reasons to hate and resist the French.

One of the French’s reckless mistakes was firing on the Al-Azhar mosque and entering it on their horses to quell a local uprising. The Egyptians were furious and sullen even though unarmed while the Mamluks, former rulers, were divided and weakened. The people resisted and revenged against the colonial violence in what was later known as the Cairo Revolution. The rebellion had a religious as well as a national character and centred on the Al-Azhar mosque. Its leaders were the *ulama*, religiously trained scholars, whom Napoleon had tried to woo to the French side.

Eventually, the French withdrawal came as a result of both internal and the external factors. Internal factors were in the form of the people’s defiance and revolution while the external factor was the consequence of the British-Ottoman alliance. The British navy sank most of Napoleon's ships at Abu-Kir followed by a joint Anglo-Ottoman landing at Alexandria. In the end the two parties reached a general European treaty, to get the French forces out of Egypt in 1801.

### TEXT AND CONTEXT

In *Napoleon in Al-Azhar*, Najib Al-Kailani provides an account of the French invasion of Egypt in the period 1798-1801. Al-Kailani is prolific Egyptian author who wrote about seventy books in different literary genres. He was born in 1931 in an Egyptian countryside. Though a physician by profession, Al-Kailani is recognized as an outstanding novelist, poet and critic.

Al- Kailani has dealt with almost all aspects of human life, particularly the sufferings of the Muslim nation under colonial rule. Most of his novels deal with major historical events taking place in different Islamic countries. Najib Al-Kailani's contribution to Arabic literature is not confined to novels and short stories; he has also left his mark in poetry, drama, literary criticism, and autobiographies. Al-Kailani received numerous awards and wide recognition; two of his books were approved to be taught in the secondary schools in Egypt *The Long Path* (1956) and *The Promised Day* (1960).

The novel *Nābulūn fī al-Azhar* (*Napoleon in Al-Azhar*) was first published in 1980 by Al-Mukhtār Al-Islāmī for publication and distribution. Later on, and in the following editions, the author changed the title into *Mawkiḥ al-Aḥrār* (1994) (*The Caravan of the FreeMen*). Unfortunately there is no English translation of this novel; therefore the excerpts translated here are mine unless indicated otherwise. The French conquest of Egypt was the backdrop of this novel and the source of Al-Kailani’s inspiration.

Events in the novel take place in a small town, outside Cairo at that time, called Bolaq. However, later on and due to the capital expansion it became part of Cairo. This small

town represents the Egyptian society at that time. People from different walks of life reside there. The protagonist is Haj Mustafa Al-Bashtili, a middle-class merchant who rebels and leads the second wave of confrontation on the French army. He sacrifices everything he owns for the sake of his country and people. Resistance against the French costs him his wealth, family, and ultimately his life when he was arrested and eventually murdered.

Through Haj Mustafa's eyes and voice, we follow Napoleon's expedition in Egypt. He conveys to the reader all the accounts of the colonizer and the Egyptians' affairs and reactions. We observe in detail the sequence of events starting from the arrival of the French forces in Alexandria and then their move to Cairo. At the time when the French arrived, Egypt was actually under the control of a foreign power, the Mamluks. The Egyptians have been suffering from exploitation and subjugation for a long time. Thus, when Mustafa hears about Napoleon's army, he is inspired by the idea of resistance even though his main concern is the people's response as he knows his people and their passive way of life well.

Haj Mustafa and his family were involved in all the resistance activities in the different stages. They were involved in the first wave of rebellion that ended tragically with a huge massacre of the civilians; his daughter's fiancé was among them. Consequently Haj Mustafa was arrested and sent to jail for a few months before he was released after a ransom was paid.

The prison experience was so influential in Haj Mustafa's character that he became more determined to fight and expel the colonizers. He played an essential role in the second wave of confrontation which took a few months of preparations. When Egyptian people heard about the sinking of the French ship by the British navy, they occupied the streets attacking the colonial soldiers. Despite the initial success of the resistance, the colonial forces seized the city at the end and started a revenge operation that led to another massacre. Haj Mustafa was arrested again but this time he was executed.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **FANON'S PROCESS OF DECOLONIZATION: VIOLENCE AND RESISTANCE**

Decolonization in its simple and obvious manifestation is the transfer of power from the oppressor aliens to the indigenous and the aboriginals. According to Fanon, the main feature of this process is the excessive use of violence by both the colonizer and the colonized. Violence for Fanon (1963) is "physical violence—the infliction or threat of infliction of painful injury, by instruments like whips, bayonets, guns and fists. This physical violence pervades every aspect of the colonial world, it pervades even any peace" (Frazer & Kimberly, 2008, p.91). Violence and its effects is the core of Fanon's study (1963) on (de)colonization in his various works. He looked at violence from different perspectives: the colonial process, the colonizer, and the colonized. Regarding the colonial process, Fanon attempts to attract our attention to the basic fact that liberation and decolonization is merely a "violent event"; the first sentence of his book *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963) states that: "National liberation, national reawakening, restoration of the nation to the people or Commonwealth, whatever the name used, whatever the latest expression, decolonization is always a violent event" (p.35).

Fanon (1963) argues that the colonizer is constantly imposing violence upon the colonized, not only because colonization itself is an act of violence, but for the colonizer to maintain his power over the natives. He must always assert his hegemony through violent acts, both physical and psychological. These colonial practices eventually lead to deform the identity of the colonial subject. "It is through their 'bayonets' and 'cannon fire' that they have destroyed the very social fabric of native life, i.e. economy, lifestyle, and modes of

dress. ... If the colonialists can say that the native is an animal it is because their violence has reduced him to an animal-like existence" (Fanon, 1963, p.108).

Therefore violence is the only language that the colonizer understands; "colonialism only loosens its hold when the knife is at its throat" (Fanon, 1963, p.61). According to Fanon, violence for the colonized is, also the best cure to heal wounds in the psyche caused by the colonial experience. The colonized subject must undergo a rehabilitation operation to gain back his identity and violence is his remedy. Chew and David (2010) assert that "violence, for Fanon (1963), was not only a political strategy to secure independence; it was a psychological necessity to liberate the minds of the colonized from the repressive effects of the empire" (p. 13).

Fanon states that there is evidence of the improved mental state of a colonized person in rebellion, in the decline of crime once revolution has begun: "It is common knowledge that significant social upheavals lessen the occurrence of misdemeanours and social disorders" (1963, p. 230). This is, Fanon concludes, because the colonized has redirected his feelings of anger and dissatisfaction into a single force: an anticolonial movement, wherein the colonizers are accused of being the source of all grievances, whose elimination coincides with the reparation of those grievances. Fanon (1963) also argues: "At the individual level, violence is a cleansing force. It rids the colonized of their inferiority complex, of their passive and despairing attitude. It emboldens them, and restores their self-confidence" (1963, p. 51).

In the novel *Napoleon in Al-Azhar*, violence is an essential element in the accounts of the novel. Violence is the colonizer's main tool to implement his dominance and hegemony over the Egyptian society. The French Army in Napoleon's expedition, since their first day, controlled the land by their power and subjected the Egyptian with force. They committed massacres as well as detained and tortured the resistant people; as a result the people's response also takes a form of violent armed resistance.

Fanon's (1963) theory on the formation of resistance literature consists of three stages, namely assimilation, rediscovering and fighting. The first stage, which is assimilation to the dominant culture, describes the first response of the native intellectual towards the colonial. Fanon (1963) explains this stage in *The Wretched of the Earth*: "His – the native intellectual- writings correspond point by point with those of his opposite numbers in the mother country. His inspiration is European and we can easily link up these works with definite trends in the literature of the mother country" (1963, p. 222).

The second stage is the native intellectual's rediscovery of his heritage. Fanon explains the second stage stating that: "This period of creative work approximately corresponds to that immersion which we have just described. But since the native is not a part of his people, since he only has exterior relations with his people, he is content to recall their life only" (1963, p. 222). Finally, the third stage is the fighting stage where the native intellectual tries to awaken the people to struggle. At the last stage, the native intellectual undergoes the turning phase and "[i]nstead of according the people's lethargy an honoured place in his esteem, he turns himself into an awakener of the people; hence comes a fighting literature, a revolutionary literature, and a national literature" (Fanon, 1963, pp. 222-223).

Colonization has destructive effects upon the colonial subject and his land. An identity crisis of the colonial subject is one of these destructive features shown within the indigenous person and society. As one of the objectives of the colonialist is to have the indigenous people believe in their inferiority, the colonial power insists on deforming and distorting the local culture. Under the physical and mental domination and constant negative portrayals of indigenous people and history, the indigenous person begins to question his own identity and becomes caught between the historical concept and present day reality. Therefore, the prominent achievement of decolonization, besides the country's liberation, is to reform the

subject's deformed identity and "If colonialism is depersonalizing, decolonization must involve reclaiming humanity" (Thame, 2011).

## ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Al-Kailani in *Napoleon in Al-Azhar* portrays a colonial story from its own beginning. In the novel, we knew about Napoleon's arrival to Alexandria, a port city on the Mediterranean Sea in northern Egypt, and how he overcame the Mamluks easily. The two parties, French and Mamluk's, were not equal in terms of the equipment and training. Napoleon's army was far superior compared to the Mamluk's because it was equipped with advanced weapons while the Mamluks had nothing of that. Therefore the result was certain and predictable. The Mamluks fled and left the main cities like Alexandria and Cairo for the Upper Egypt.

Colonization is a very tragic experience in different aspects as it drastically changes people's lives completely. "To lose a home for any reason is a trauma that tends to leave one scarred for life" (Noraini et al 2012, p. 95). To de-colonise the colonised, Fanon (1963) suggests a three-stage theory of resistance, mentioned earlier, that consists of initially assimilation, then rediscovering, and eventually confrontation and fighting.

Assimilation is the first stage and this happen in the early phases of colonialism. It is, according to Fanon (1963), the initial response of the colonized subject. The colonized, under the shock of the colonization, is either impressed or confused regarding the proper acts against the newcomer. This stage may also indicate consent towards the coloniser. However, assimilation of Egyptians in the French culture is not that obvious in the story. That may be because of the short period of the colonial era which lasted less than three years, from 1798 to 1801, when the French were forced to leave the country. Instead of the full assimilation, we observe a kind of anticipation of the entire scene and sometimes a state of apathy or indifference among Egyptians.

Al-Kailani depicts such situations when he portrayed the principle of resistance from the colonized perspective; was it an optional matter that one can choose or refuse, or was it an inevitable fate. In the conversation between Haj Mustafa Al-Bashtili and his friend Al-Madboli, the gunpowder dealer, they raised this issue:

Al-Bashtili said: it is better for us to walk barefooted, empty stomach and be free rather than to live in palaces and wear silk while we are slaves for French.

Al-Madboli replied: I do not believe in the feasibility of resistance after all what I have heard. You have to be aware that nothing can stand in front of French cannons. Their experience in fighting is also unimaginable. The preparations are nonesuch. Leave the illusions aside. Be rational rather than emotional. I know that my speech may bother you and I may be called a coward or traitor. I do not care. I am a man of logic. My trade has taught me a lot.

Al-Bashtili's reaction was so calm, he replied: You can think the way that you like to get the conclusions that make sense to you; however the indisputable fact is that any nation that has been attacked and colonized, has to defend its dignity. We have not read in history that a nation surrendered without resistance. French are human beings like us, they win and lose. Throughout history, there is no nation that wins all the time (Al-Kailani, 1994, p.49).

This state of either anticipation or apathy explains why the civilian participation came late in this war as they did not join the fight at the start. At the beginning, it was a battle between two armies while the civilians were not involved. This factor helped Napoleon and his

colonial troops to win the battle quickly. The citizens' stand might be due to more reasons, beside the anticipation and apathy, such as the mismanagement of battle by their rulers, the Mamluks. The Mamluks entered the fight with a mixture of arrogance and ignorance. They underestimated the strength of the French army and therefore they did not prepare themselves well. It was a strategic mistake that they did not declare 'the general mobilization' to get the people's support and backup. In the novel, we can see that the Mamluk's arrogance and ignorance when Hilda, Bartelmeen's daughter, went to meet her beloved Ibrahim Aga, a Mamluk soldier, amidst the preparations of the war; there was no one there except for the Mamluk soldiers (Al-Kailani, 1994, p.36).

The second reason behind the Egyptian people's stand was their own perspective toward this war. Al-Haj Mustafa Al-Bashtili, in his conversation with his friends when they heard about the French arrival, states his intention to fight the French but his friend, Haj Ghamri, tried to calm him down by saying:

Even if that is true and they [the French] are on their way, why does that disturb you? They will be neither worse than the Mamluks nor more cursed than the Ottomans. Nothing will change, however your business and trade may prosper. (Al-Kailani, 1994, p.9)

This feeling of being passive and retroactive was the reason behind the people's reluctance to oppose the French.

Another hint of assimilation attempts in *Napoleon in Al-Azhar* is when Napoleon formed *al-Divan*, an advisory council consisting of elite Egyptians, to be under the rule and supervision of the French. They are the persons who are expected to influence and lead the nation and the commonality. Instead they extended their hands to the colonisers. In the novel, Napoleon reveals to Bertlmeen, the governor's deputy of Cairo, his plan to form this advisory council. He said:

I decided to establish al-Divan, which will constitute the scholars, merchants, farmers, and the notables to be a small parliament. Its reality is that it will be an assistant organization for us. It will speak to the people on our behalf. We will create constant conflict between it and the people. Sometimes we will meet some wishes of al-Divan to help it solve the people's problem, when it is necessary. (Al-Kailani 1994, pp. 82-83).

The next stage is the self-awareness and rediscovery of the local's identity and heritage. This stage occurs when the colonized people realize the amount of aggression and oppression they live under. Self-awareness comes usually based on and subsequent to the first stage, assimilation. The image of the other's superiority and the self's inferiority is corrected and revisioned.

Colonization is a "matter of consciousness" as Fanon stated (1963, p.13) therefore the first step of decolonization and liberation is the "self-awareness". Earlier to this step the liberation cannot be achieved as the idea of resistance has not been formed yet. When Haj Mustafa met with his friends in his house once they heard about the French army heading to Egypt and the news has not been confirmed yet, Haj Mustafa was so worried and disturbed as he realizes the meaning of such an expedition. On the other hand, one of his friends, Haj Al-Ghamry replied to him: "Even if the news of this expedition is correct, why are you disturbed? They will neither be worse than the Mamluks nor more cursed than the Ottomans. The situation will not change that much. Perhaps, your business will prosper" (Al-Kailani, 1994, p. 9). This reply indicates the absence of awareness of the risks and dangers of colonization among people at this early stage of the colonization.



On the other hand, in the following scenes of the novel, Haj Mustafa in his dialogues and speeches to the people keeps focusing on raising the people's awareness about their responsibility toward their country. For this sake, he keeps reminding them of their great history, belief, and heritage. In addition, Sheikhs of Al-Azhar also play the same role in their talks and speeches to the people. The result of this discovery is gaining the sense of dignity and pride so they reject any kind of humiliation and assault.

The novel casts a light on the significance of the religious factor in maintaining and reinforcing people's identity. This clarifies Napoleon's proclamation of Islam and his message to the Egyptians about this matter that he 'worships God more than the Mamluks do' and went on to claim that the French 'are also true Muslims'. Needless to say, this claim was not convincing, although religion was one of the most serious problems that the French eventually faced.

For the Egyptians, when the French attacked Alexandria and defeated the Mamluks, the people were so baffled and confused. The sudden absence of the political leadership left the people in a vacuum. Therefore the only front they had at that time was the Al-Azhar mosque. The novel shows to us that the first place people went to, after the French attack was the Al-Azhar mosque. Haj Mustafa Al-Bashtili and his son went there as well to see what the people will decide.

When he, Haj Al-Bashtili, approached Al-Azhar, he heard someone called out: Come to the fight, Come to the success (Imitating the prayer call 'azan': come to the prayer, come to the success). What a wonderful call, then he turned to his son: Don't you hear, oh my son? It is the call of life. Look! The people gather together in thousands. Revolution's flood overruns everybody and melts them in one pot. (Al-Kailani, 1994, p.24)

Therefore, the real leaders of the liberty and battle for freedom battle were the sheikhs of Al-Azhar who gathered, guided, and led the people and convinced them of their role and responsibility in this war. They have what Napoleon told Bertlmeen "I think the sheikhs in Al-Azhar have far-reaching spiritual influences" (Al-Kailani, 1994, p.81). Understanding this role, the first target of the French army when they conquered Cairo in the second wave was Al-Azhar. The French troops tried to take revenge so they intentionally desecrated the mosque, walking in with their shoes on and guns displayed. The troops tied their horses to the *mihrab* and ransacked the student quarters and libraries, throwing copies of the Quran to the floor.

According to Fanon's theory, violence in resistance also plays a significant role in restoring the colonized people's identity. Chew and David (2010) also claim that "there is no possibility of a return to a state prior to colonial intervention, nor is there a 'cure' for colonialism; recuperation is only possible through violence" (p.13). This is what we can witness in this novel. The people's awareness of themselves and of their oppressor is transformed.

The Egyptians experienced two types of oppression; the first one was under the Mamluks and the second was the French. Their experience with the Mamluks was not that bloody and cruel while the French experience was different. At the beginning of the novel we can hear Haj Mustafa complaining of the people's inactive reactions against the practices of the Mamluks in the old days. This made him worried about the people's response when the French army arrives. Later on and due to the oppression and subjugation, we observe a change in the people's reactions towards Napoleon and his men. Haj Mustafa on his way to Al-Azhar was so delighted when he saw hundreds of young men training with old cannons (Al-Kailani, 1994, p.24).

The violent colonial practices contributed in constructing the oppressed people's awareness about the reality of the colonization. Haj Mustafa, representing the oppressed people, underwent through different types of subjugation. A prison experience, which lasted a few months, was so distressing and dreary for him. When he left the prison, the town's atmosphere had totally changed as most of the people he knew had either been killed or left.

Hence, the reaction from the colonized is inevitable in such a case as it is the colonizers' violence that generates violence from the colonized. Therefore, Haj Mustafa started preparation for a revolution against the French once he left the prison. In a few months, the rebellion was ignited, spreading in the entire city. He succeeded in organizing the volunteers and attacking the French troops.

Subsequently, the natural consequence of the second stage is the confrontations with the colonialists to gain back their liberty and dignity as they have already gained their identity. Confrontation and fighting is the third stage in Fanon's theory of resistance. Al-Kailani aptly depicts this stage in this novel as the fight or war occurred in two waves in the novel. The first one led to a huge massacre among civilians. Haj Mustafa Al-Bashtili participated in both. Some of his family members were affected, his daughter's fiancé was killed and his son Hussein was injured. Consequently, and after a long investigation, Haj Mustafa was arrested and imprisoned. In the prison, he went through different types of tortures and saw that many people were tormented to death. Eventually his family paid a ransom to release him from the prison.

Later on, in the second wave, all the colonial troops, equipped with modern artillery, stood helpless and withdrew in front of the defiant revolutionaries. The revolutionaries could control the town at the beginning; however, the occupation forces eventually besieged the town. The blockade was so effective and devastating that their supplies and provisions ran out. Eventually, the French forces attacked the town and committed horrible atrocities. At the end of the novel, we witness the murdering of Haj Mustafa at the hand of Bertlmeen.

## CONCLUSION

Najib Al-Kailani in his novel *Napoleon in Al-Azhar* provides a story of colonialism, the struggle for liberty, and decolonization. Al-Kailani in this revisionist work re-narrates Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798. It depicts the resistance of the Egyptian people, highlighting the violent actions by the colonial forces and their impact on the colonized subjects. Fanon's (1963) concepts regarding violence in decolonization provide an appropriate theoretical foundation to read and understand Al-Kailani's novel that highlights the role of violence and its effects on colonized people.

In this paper, we applied Fanon's (1963) concepts of the three-step process of decolonization: assimilation, rediscovery and confrontation in the analysis of the novel. The analysis revealed that the three steps are sequential; whereby every step leads to the next one and the later stages are results of the earlier ones. Assimilation is the first stage and actually is more likely to be the pre-decolonization stage that shows the climax of the colonization. In this stage, it is revealed how the colonized subjects become familiar with the ways and policies of the colonizers. The second stage, rediscovery, is the awakening and the preparatory stage for liberation. This is when the colonized subjects fully grasp the extent of the oppression, and are awakened into a nationalistic consciousness. Confrontation, the last stage, represents the iceberg and the cumulative outcome of the previous stages.

While *Napoleon in Al-Azhar* is a revisionist account of French expedition in the eighteenth century, Fanon's (1963) theory was mainly inspired by the Algerian struggle and revolution against the French in the twentieth century. Though the setting of the novel, which is Egypt in the eighteenth century, is different from the base for Fanon's theory, Algeria in

the twentieth century, both of these settings share the same oppressor and colonizer; the French. Al-Kailani, like Fanon, asserts the significance of violence in restoring both the occupied land and the distorted identity of the people.

Scholars who are studying Arab novels, particularly those that have 'resistance' as a theme, would find the analysis presented in this paper insightful as the current study reveals that new dimensions are possible in the reading and interpretations of such novels. For example, the analysis of *Napoleon in Al-Azhar* implies that Al-Kailani views the violence that is apparent in the colonization and decolonization processes as being rooted in ideological differences, while Fanon's (1963) views on violence have a more psychological base. Similar studies involving other Arab 'resistance' novels that are set in different periods and locales could be conducted to ascertain if other authors share a similar view on violence.

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